

Thank You, Mr Kitchener by [jn.lynnne](#)

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Summary: The explosion of the Kitchener Ironworks on Easter Sunday, 1906, as experienced by a young mother. Warnings for child death, as is wont to happen in the universe of Stephen King.

Thank You, Mr Kitchener

DERRY, 1906

KITCHENER IRONWORKS

APRIL 15, EASTER SUNDAY

It's too bright, Betty Osgoode thought, raising a forearm to shield her eyes from the sun. Much too bright. Someone's eyes might catch the sun and they'll fall and hurt themselves.

The children were scattered all around her, running and shouting and turning over every little thing they could find that could possibly hide one of the 500 or so Easter eggs tucked into the nooks and crannies of the Kitchener Ironworks. She wasn't sure how many had been found so far; nobody had bothered to round up the little ones to do an official count, but maybe it was for the best. It was such a fun day, and what right did the grown-ups have to pull the kids away from their treasure hunt to bother with a thing like logistics? They'd continue until it was too dark for the hunt to continue safely, and then they'd see how well the children of Derry, Maine, had done for themselves (and, conversely, how well the adults of the town were at hiding things from them). Hiding things from them. What a queer thought. Betty had no idea why the words had formed like that in her head. She shook the idea away and went back to watching the games from the shade of her own elbow.

A light breeze blew her dress around her ankles. It was pleasantly warm for an April day in Maine, considering the fact that the mercury in the thermostats had spent the first half of the month hovering around 35°. Odd that it should have suddenly taken a turn for the warmer, Betty thought, but it was Easter, and if the weather was going to turn at any point, it might as well have been on the day of the Resurrection. All the better to bring Derry and the rest of the Northeast back to life. It had been a hard winter, made even harder by the violence and disappearances that had plagued the town for the last year. The business with Claude Heroux had seemed the worst of it, what with the fires, the murders, and finally the lynching—the first (and only) lynching Betty could ever recall hearing about in the entire history of the Derry township. The change in weather seemed to signify what Betty in her heart knew: it was all coming to a head. It would all be over soon.

She smiled and gazed across part of the open field at her husband, standing like a sentinel as he watched the children scramble over and around each other. His face was stern, but kind, exactly the sort of face Betty's father had had. Howard Osgoode felt his wife's eyes on him and smiled. It was a knowing sort of feeling that only two people perfectly in love could share. He knew she was looking at him, and she knew he knew it. They didn't need words. She blew him a kiss from her side of the field, and he lightly patted the pocket of his vest, his way of saying, "I've got it right here, Betty, and I'll be saving it for later."

Their own two boys were somewhere in that mess of laughter and scraped knees. Jerry, their eldest, was no doubt helping some of the younger children with their haul to the detriment of his own. He was made to be a big brother, Betty thought, even before she'd been pregnant with her second child. He looked out for other children and cared for them. When all the troubles had started back in 1905, he'd taken it upon himself to make sure the neighborhood kids were never alone, and never outside after dark. He'd have a brilliant military career someday, Betty thought, if the occasion ever called for it. He had a knack for sensing trouble and leading others away from it. He was a wise little boy, and reminded Betty so much of her own husband and father that her heart nearly burst with pride when she thought of it.

Her younger boy had not been so easy as Jerry. The pregnancy had been riddled with problems, and the birth itself had nearly cost Betty and the newborn their lives. In the days when just about every birth and death happened in the familial home, Betty Osgoode became one of the first three women to give birth in the Derry Home Hospital. The doctors had doubts as to how long the newest Osgoode boy would survive; one particularly awful nurse had suggested to Betty that maybe she should hold off on naming the child, just in case. Instead of starting a fight, Betty'd asked what the nurse had hoped to name her son, should she ever have one. She was a thin slip of a girl, and her hips didn't look right for someone who had already given birth. There was a ring on her finger, but no "bun in the oven," as it was sometimes said, and the wrong hips to have one waiting at home. Dorothy, the nurse, said she had hoped to name her first child (she was sure it would be a boy) Timothy, after her uncle who had died fighting the Spaniards. Betty thought about it for a moment. She liked the name Timothy. She told the nurse as much and asked her to fetch the doctor and the birth certificate. Male Child, Osgoode, became

Timothy Carlton Osgoode, and Betty never saw Dorothy again, save one day at a train depot in Bangor years later, when Dorothy's belly was finally swollen with what Betty immediately could tell was a girl.

Jerry assumed his brotherly duties as soon as Timothy and his mother were released and allowed to return home. Jerry was four years older than Timothy, but to him, it seemed a lifetime. There was so much he had to teach his brother, so much he knew about that Tim couldn't yet understand, so much to protect him from, and there just didn't seem like there would ever be enough time for him to do all that he needed to do for his Timothy. It was how he had thought of Tim from the beginning: HIS. Sure, he belonged to Mother and Father the way that all little boys belonged to their parents, but the way he belonged to Jerry was fiercer, more primal. Betty had always known that Jerry seemed to have a sense for danger, but she never guessed how real it was to her older son. It was much more than a sense to him. It was an instinct. It was a knowing. It was a fact. There was real danger in their lives and if he was correct, which he always was, it meant it didn't just *seem* like he would never have enough time for Tim—their time was running out, and fast.

That Easter Sunday in 1906, Jerry had just turned nine years old. He was old enough to know that there was no Santa, and old enough to know that it was the grownups, and not the Easter Bunny, who had hidden the eggs at the Kitchener Ironworks. Tim, on the other hand, was not yet five, and Jerry would be damned—a phrase he had heard his father use, but never known exactly what it meant—if he would let the cat out of the bag and spoil his brother's fun. At present, with both of their parents looking fondly after them, Jerry and Tim were leading a gang of treasure hunters through an old Spanish Galleon to find brightly-wrapped doubloons in the wreckage of the old ships. Even some of the older kids were following them; Jerry was a charismatic leader, and he made the hunt so much more fun than it already was. In his mind, it was all for his Tim, but he wouldn't mind a bit if the other kids had fun, too. The boys and girls skipped around the Ironworks, following the path Jerry was leading them on, and not a single one of them cared whether or not they had found their two allotted eggs or not.

Betty walked over to her husband, waving to Jerry and Tim as they ran past towards an open door of the 'works. A gang of children followed and mumbled variations of, "Happy Easter, Mrs. Osgoode," and "Afternoon,

Missus." Howard Osgoode turned and placed a chaste kiss on his wife's sunburnt cheek.

"Your face will be red for a week, you know," he chided, nodding at the last of his sons' group as they disappeared through the door.

"And you'll love it anyway," was her reply. She wrapped her hands around his elbow and held it tightly. Something like worry crossed her face, but she shook it away before Howard could see it.

She wasn't nearly as quick as she'd thought. "What is it, my dear?" Howard asked, rubbing one of his hands over hers. She felt cold to the touch; that was terribly unlike Betty. His Betty was warm even when the taps in their home had frozen solid in the winter. She didn't respond. She pressed her lips together and stared at the doorway she'd just watched her children run through.

Run into to be devoured, she thought.

"Bets," Howard said, now becoming vaguely frightened, "you tell me right now what it is that's upset you." If Jerry had an unnatural sense for danger, then he'd almost certainly inherited it from his mother. Betty may have been unaware of it herself, but she, too, got a strange itch between her shoulder blades just before something would go wrong. Howard watched them sometimes, especially during this past year, when neither one of them was aware of anything outside of their own thoughts. When word came up that Claude Heroux had hacked to death a group of men in a bar and not a single person in the sea of patrons had done anything to stop him, both Betty and Jerry had responded too calmly to the news. Jerry, he could understand, was a child, and had no reason to go into hysterics, but Betty, as a mother and a member of the Derry community, had every reason to go wild at the thought. These were men she knew. They were men her husband work and drank with. They were men who'd smiled at Tim and Jerry and offered them peppermint sticks for being such good boys, and they'd watched a crazed Canuck with an axe literally take apart four other human beings, calm-as-you-like. Yet both had simply nodded, somewhat perplexed, as if both of them had been expecting to hear something similar and were only confused by the timing. Looking back on it that night as Howard tried and tried and ultimately failed to fall asleep, he remembered that, twenty minutes before anyone had come to the house (roughly, he assumed, the time Claude was likely to have

picked up his axe and started separating people from their parts), they'd both had the look of a rabbit who realizes he's already been scented by a dog. There's nothing to be done now, that look said, but to put up a good run before it eats us, and hope to God it swallows us without using its teeth

That was exactly the look Betty had on her face right now, and Howard didn't like it. He grabbed her by the shoulders, hoping that it hurt, hoping it would chase that look away and replace it with an expression of anger. It didn't. Her eyes met his, and they were defeated. There had been worry there, he knew, but now it had been replaced by an uneasy acceptance.

"What time is it?" Betty asked quietly. The question startled Howard. Why did it matter what time it was? But she seemed so intent on getting an answer that it did not occur to him to rebuff her. He fumbled in his vest pocket (the same one holding Betty's kiss for later) and produced his new brass pocket watch. He popped it open and read the dials.

"Just past three," he told her. He tried to catch her eye, but she was looking past him into the empty doorway. Looking into the mouth of the dog that had scented her and hoping to God it wasn't about to use its teeth. "Bets, please tell me what's—"

"The clock didn't chime today," she mumbled, taking a shaking step toward the Ironworks building. "At noon. It should have chimed at noon, but it didn't."

She was about to walk further when she heard her son's voice, her oldest boy's voice, scream out in terror.

"MOTHER!" Jerry screamed. He screamed again, but it was wordless and strangled. "MOTHER, PLEASE, OH GOD, YOU HAVE TO GET US—"

Betty whirled around in a panic, but nobody else seemed to be looking for the source of the voice. In fact, none of the others had even seemed to hear the screams. Even Howard, who still held her at her elbow, hadn't heard it. What was going on? How was she hearing her son screaming for her if he wasn't, in fact, screaming at all?

"MOTHER! PLEASE! PLEASE, OH PLEASE! IT'S GOING TO GET US ALL. YOU HAVE TO GET THEM OUT. YOU HAVE TO RUN, MOTHER,

PLEASE! IT'S—"

At that moment, Timothy came running out of the building with several of Jerry's group behind him. They were panting, but looked unhurt. Timothy wrapped his arms around his mother's waist and buried his head in her skirt. He made small snuffling noises and it took her a moment to get over her shock and realize that he was crying. Howard watched the other kids huddle around them, but nobody said a word. They looked slightly dazed, not necessarily scared, but certainly ill-at-ease. Something had happened, but what? It was quiet. It was so, so quiet. Even the sounds of the other children searching for their eggs sounded far away now. They must have all gone inside as well. The chaperones held up their posts admirably, but not a single one of them seemed to notice that anything was amiss. And why should they have? Other than this one doorway, not a thing had gone wrong. Had anything even gone wrong? Timothy, always a small, sickly boy, was clinging to his mother, and the other children were looking after him with pity. There wasn't anything unusual about that.

Oh, but if only they could hear the sounds inside Betty's head. "MOTHER! MAMA! GET THEM OUT. IT SAYS IT WANTS US ALL." She couldn't make sense of it. She had one son sobbing between her legs, but the other was...

She suddenly jerked Timothy away from her with such force that it momentarily stopped his crying. "Where is your brother?" she shouted, her voice high with panic. "You all came back out here. Where is Jerry?"

The other kids shifted uncomfortably, forming a semi-circle around Mrs. Osgoode and her boy. Timothy's eyes were wide with terror. Rivets of tears and snot poured down his face and soaked the front of his best Sunday shirt. He tried to find his voice, only to discover he no longer had one. Whatever they had seen in there, or hadn't seen, had taken it. Whatever Jerry had tried so hard to keep him away from, it had stolen his voice and he didn't think it ever planned to give it back.

Betty searched hard in his eyes and saw the terror there. She slapped him once, just enough to start him crying again, and then again, much harder this time, to get him to stop. He knew he had to tell her something. He knew he had to tell her what Jerry had seen, and what Jerry had told him to tell her, but it was beyond him now. Betty saw something standing in her son's eyes and knew it was keeping a piece of him for itself. Whatever

it was, she didn't have time to fight it. She didn't have time to do anything. She'd been scented, and so had Jerry, but the dog had only been at her heels and now it was at Jerry's throat. She pushed Timothy into Howard's arms and started toward the doorway. It had only been brick and concrete before, but now it looked like a big, gaping mouth. The industrial bulbs that lined the hallway beyond the doorframe looked at first like giant, blazing eyes, and then like something else entirely. They looked like balloons, filled with light, and then, further down, they looked like bright, orange pom-poms bursting from the brick walls of the Ironworks.

"MOTHER!" The scream came again, but she was sure it wasn't only in her head this time. "DON'T COME IN HERE, MOTHER DON'T COME IN DON'T COME THEY'RE ALL GOING TO FLOAT, DO YOU UNDERSTAND? MOTHER, THEY ARE ALL GOING TO FLOAT!"

When she turned back to look at the group that had amassed behind her, they were all staring at her as though they were afraid she had gone crazy.

"Doesn't anybody hear that?" She shrieked. The breeze that had earlier tickled her ankles was now beginning to work itself into a frenzy.

"MOTHER, PLEASE! MOTHER!"

Not a single face showed any recognition that her son was screaming for his life somewhere in the building behind her. The building that somehow had a mouth, and somehow had no lights but orange pom-poms instead. Didn't they see it? Didn't they see any of it? More parents were coming around to see what was happening.

No, no, no, Betty thought, her own thoughts screaming inside of her. That's what it wants. It wants you over here. It wants you away from the children.

The adults all had the same, vacant expression on their faces. Even her own Howard, who had been so concerned mere moments before, now watched her like she was an actress in a play.

Someone please, she begged silently, someone look at me and know whatever it is that I can't seem to know.

And then someone did. She met the eyes of a young boy, the only black boy in the crowd. She knew him. Dick. He had sometimes played with Jerry when they were younger. Dick's mother had been their cook. Betty let her eyes scream at Dick's and something in his eyes was screaming right back at her. The eyes of the girl next to him were doing the same thing. The adults looked on stupidly, but there was a fierce intelligence in the eyes of the children that scared Betty almost as much as hearing her own son's voice screaming for help was scaring her. The children. It had to do with the children.

Then she remembered something her own grandmother had told her, just before she died:

"This town, something about Derry is wrong, Elizabeth. You get yourself out before it gets you."

That wasn't something you were supposed to say to a child, she knew. Betty's grandmother was senile. She hardly recognized her most days. She was almost eighty. She'd lost a husband in the Civil War. She was rambling, and Betty shouldn't have listened to it, but her grandmother's eyes had been as stoney and clear as a girl's of seventeen when she'd grabbed her by the arms and uttered her last words.

Something about Derry is wrong, Elizabeth.

*And those were the words she saw echoed in every child's eyes that dared to meet hers. They stared at her in shock. Surely she couldn't know what they thought! No grownup ever did. They went inside their homes and drew the drapes. They walked past the horrible things that were happening on the streets. The children of Derry had to protect their own. Jerry Osgoode had told them so himself. And even if he hadn't, the disappearances, the voices, the **things** they saw in the woods—those all belonged to the children. The adults couldn't protect them. The adults didn't see It.*

Betty tore herself from the frightened stares of the children and forced herself to look down that hallway again, the hallway where she knew her little boy who would have a brave military career was waiting for her. It looked like it was draped in silver cloth now, and the walls were dotted everywhere by those maddening old pom poms. She had seen them before; she knew she had.

The clown! The vision came at her so fast she thought she would bleed when it finally hit her. She had been so young then, but, standing now in front of that god-awful silver hallway, she could remember the clown as clear as day, as he was walking near the woods at the back of her father's fields. He was dressed in a silver suit that was dotted down the front with orange pom-poms, his bright hair sticking out on either side of his head as he skipped and flipped his way toward the frightened, then-four-year-old Betty Newsome. In his hands, he held an impossible number of balloons.

"Come on, Elizabeth," he'd called out to her, leaning against a fencepost and beckoning amiably, "don't you want a balloon?"

She shook her head fiercely, but she didn't run. She did want a balloon, after all. She really did, but there was something wrong about him. What was a clown doing on her daddy's farm? There wasn't any circus in town, and there certainly wasn't one on Hank Newsome's east field. The clown laughed again and vaulted over the fence as easily as any acrobat. Under normal circumstances, it would have been funny, but Betty wasn't laughing, and the clown was still getting closer.

"Aw, Elizabeth," the clown said, holding out the balloons like a bouquet. There were so many of them, and it seemed like there were more of them every time she took her eyes off his face and looked back at them. "Every little girl wants a balloon. Go on and take one. I've just got so many, I don't know what to do with 'em all."

They should have carried him off, she remembered thinking. They should have floated away. Oh yes, they would. They would all float.

"MOTHER, THEY ARE ALL GOING TO FLOAT!"

Those pom-poms, all over the hallway! Couldn't they see it? Couldn't they hear it? Betty took a staggering step toward that hellish doorway and it was like trying to swim through molasses. Her arms and feet felt heavier than they ever had, and the air felt thick around her. Time had slowed down. It must have. There was no way she could be moving this slowly, not when her oldest son, the son she could sometimes look at and know what he was thinking, the son who could sense danger the way she had sensed danger before she'd learned to shut it out, the son who, as the mother of little Dick Hallorann had said, could Shine with the best of them—

He was shining now, her Jerry. He was shining with danger, and she was shining with fear, and she wished she had known what it had meant when the clock hadn't chimed that day at noon. She'd seen Jerry's face, and if she'd seen her own, it would have been the same. There's something wrong with Derry, Elizabeth, the old, blind woman grabbed at her granddaughter's hands, trying so desperately to make her see.

There is something terribly, terribly wrong.

"MOTHER! MOTHER! MOTHER!" The word rang out again and again inside her head. Then another voice started, screaming the same word, "MOTHER! MOTHER! MOTHER!" It was high and mocking. It was not her boy. It was not her Jerry. It was the voice of the clown, still trying to convince her to take a balloon, to come along and float with the rest of them.

"Doesn't anybody hear it?" she screamed back toward the crowd, her legs turned to stone. She wanted to run, but something was keeping her there. She stared into the hallway and all she saw were those orange pom-poms on every surface, filling the hall from top to bottom, waiting to tumble out into the daylight where surely nobody but she and the children would see them. Waiting to tumble out and drive them all completely insane.

"Doesn't anybody hear—"

There was a low rumble from somewhere inside Ironworks, another building some fifteen feet away. The people who weren't watching Betty were now looking at each other for some explanation of the noise. The Ironworks had been completely shut down for the day to make the Egg Hunt completely safe for the children. Not even a furnace had been left on, much to the chagrin of the maintenance staff, which meant starting work all the earlier the next day to get the buildings up and running. The rumble was a dangerous growl coming from somewhere in the machinery. Those who were outside began to instinctively back away. They were rabbits now, too, and something evil had caught their scent.

"MOTHER! MOTHER!" Jerry continued to scream, but the rumbling had grown so loud that Betty could barely hear it. "MOTHER! GET THEM OUT!"

Then everything went silent.

THEY ALL FLOAT WITH ME ELIZABETH.

THEY'RE ALL GOING TO FLOAT.

The Ironworks exploded with such a sudden fury that the first wave of people to be hit by the fire and debris were dead before their bodies were even ripped apart. People panicked and ran as fast as they could as the 'works burst into a tornado of shrapnel and machinery. A concussive wave flew outward from the center of the Ironworks, taking down everything in its path, even those people who had been watching from a considerable distance and had only begun to recognize the real horror of what was happening.

Beneath the sounds of the explosions were the screams of children echoing through the bowels of the Kitchener Ironworks. There were nearly one hundred children still inside the buildings when they blew, their faces and fingers still smeared with chocolate they had been eating not a minute before the blasts had rocked down the corridors and blown them to pieces. The few who were near the entrances and had nearly escaped were being crushed by the falling pieces of masonry that were plummeting back to the earth after being blown sky-high by the initial explosion. Gears wedged themselves into the heads of those poor souls standing underneath them. The bodies hit the ground instantly, only to continue to be assaulted by falling debris that pocked their bodies like minnie balls on a Civil War battlefield. And it looked like a battlefield, this place. The only difference was, there was only one side. There were no soldiers. There were only innocent victims, and well more than half of them were children.

It was utter chaos. Those that could run, ran. Those that could help did what they could, but it was all too obvious how little there was to be done. People ran screaming in every direction, some of them on fire, some of them missing limbs, some of them children, some of them adults, and all of them covered in blood. It seemed to last for hours once it began. The fires were spreading; the bricks were tumbling onto and crushing the wounded. In reality, it had only been a space of a few short minutes. Minutes, that was all. Mere minutes to ruin everything and everyone in sight and reach.

Once the sounds of the explosion quieted, the moans of the dying rose to take their place. A chorus of agony sounded from every inch of what had, moments ago, been the Kitchener Iron Works. Every few moments, a

building that had been left standing would suddenly sway and crumble, and those who watched were struck again and again with the sickening realization that there may have been survivors left inside, and they, in those few crucial moments they had taken simply to catch their breaths, had allowed them to die. The wailing, screeching, and sobbing of those left alive were the only sounds a person could hear for miles that day.

Betty stood exactly where she had been staring at the hallway full of pom-poms. The building was gone now; a pile of brick and mortar now stood in its place. Underneath that rubble lay the body of her beautiful boy, her beautiful, wonderful Jerry. Her smart, wise, military-minded boy who sensed all that danger and in the end had used it to get his brother out alive. To get the other children out as well.

Oh, he shined, her boy, she thought, tears streaming down her cheeks. Like Mrs. Hallorann had said. Her boy, he shined. He shined so bright, and he tried to tell her, in the end. He tried to tell her what she somehow already knew. MOTHER, DON'T COME IN HERE, THEY'RE ALL GOING TO FLOAT. They're going to blow up. They're going to explode. They're going to die, Betty, and now they can all float with me.

Howard had grabbed Timothy the moment he heard the rumbling. His father had been a coal miner in Pennsylvania, and it was in his blood to run the second he heard anything that sounded like it could be a collapse. Thank God he did, he thought, pressing Timothy to his chest as if he'd pull the boy into his pounding heart and keep him there. The others who had been standing near him had not been so lucky. A few of them were alive, but wounded. Some of them looked unconscious, although it was impossible to tell from where he was whether or not they were actually dead. More than likely, most of them would not be getting up again. He saw a man lying nearby with an iron rod sticking through his chest. Bright red blood splashed across his shirt. The chest was NOT moving up and down. Dead, he thought. Not even inside the Ironworks, and he's dead. Dead like all the others. Dead like—

Jerry.

Oh god. Oh god, no.

Oh god no, not my beautiful boy, please. Not my beautiful Jerry. Please, God, anything but that.

His eyes searched helplessly for the building Jerry had gone into just before the eruption.

Please, God, if you're there, and you're good, please not Jerry. Please give me my son.

He saw the pile of rubble and something inside of him broke. He pulled Timothy against him even tighter and let out an inhuman wail that was nothing but pain. His throat bled with the sound as it tore itself from his body. His heart exploded in his chest and the pain ran down his arms and into his palms, where it welled up, looking for a way to escape. He dragged his fingernails down the sides of his face, tracing his tears, until his cheeks were torn and bloody, and still he could not stop screaming. Timothy, silent in his father's arms, felt the blood dripping onto his shirt and understood better than any four year-old was capable of understanding that Jerry, his big brother, was dead.

Betty heard the screams coming from behind her and knew them to be her husband's. Why wasn't she screaming like that? They were there, the screams. She could feel them pressing against the sides of her throat. Her tongue was swollen inside her mouth. Her lips were numb. She couldn't scream because she couldn't. She was incapable. She could scream all she wanted inside her head, but the noises would never make it out of her mouth because the second they did, they would never stop. She would scream and scream and scream and never stop screaming until she was dead. She knew that, and the dull, flat pain in her heart that felt like the blade of a knife turned sharply on its side. She let out a low, "Uhhnnmm," and was silent again.

Have to find him.

Amidst the screaming in her mind, her own voice, dull and flat, tried to hold on to some semblance of reason. There were two Bettys now. There was the Betty who would scream until she died of screaming, and there was Elizabeth, the one who had known what was going to happen, if not exactly. The one who knew, because a dying woman had told her, the truth about Derry. The one who had decided never to be called Elizabeth again because the clown and the dying woman had both called her Elizabeth, which meant that Elizabeth was the one who knew the truth and Elizabeth was the one who had to be kept a secret.

Have to find him, Elizabeth said again, and Elizabeth's legs began to work as easily as Betty's had stopped.

Elizabeth walked calmly toward the ruins of the building, waiting to see if her little boy's hand would tumble delicately from behind a chunk of brick (which she knew it wouldn't, because, despite everything, Elizabeth was a strangely rational creature and knew to operate on instinct rather than emotion). If Betty was the rabbit, Elizabeth was the dog. She walked surely, but with trepidation. She had to, for the sake of her boy. It wasn't until she reached the very edge of the fallen building's foundation that she felt it. Or rather, didn't feel it. A part of her, the part of her that was Jerry, that was both his Shine and her own, was gone. And if that part was gone, it meant that Jerry was gone, and if Jerry was gone—

There were no more thoughts. She knelt beside the rubble, feeling the heat of the explosion wafting towards her in waves. It smelled like sulfur and old paper and, beneath it all, death. The crumbled bricks felt unreal underneath her fingertips. All of this rock, it was her boy's cairn. He was under it, and he'd been alive when the explosion had gone. She'd felt his fear tear through her own heart when it happened. Now he was dead. But oh, her son had been brave. She knew that more than anything else at that moment. He'd sent the other children away. He'd tried to send her away. He had warned her. It, whatever It was, had been with him. It had been the clown, and even though he'd been screaming, he'd been screaming to keep the others safe. Don't come in here. Don't let them float.

Her brave, strong, wonderful, boy. Her shining boy.

She pushed the one brick that had somehow managed to stay in tact off the top of the pile and watched it fall to the ground and break. An orange pom-pom stared up at her from where the brick had been. She leapt to her feet, the hem of her dress thick with dust, and took a step back. The pom-pom rolled after her, bouncing gleefully down the rubble-pile and rolling to a stop at the toe of her shoe.

"Eliiiiiaaaaaabeeethhhhh..."

She finally screamed.